

# Backcountry Camping Trip Guide

## Three Nights

National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
Shenandoah National Park  
Emergency: 1-800-732-0911



## Hawksbill to Swift Run via Laurel Prong

Standard - One way

**Level:** Beginner

**Total Length:** 23 miles

**Trip Description:** Mountains (highest peak), streams, waterfalls, Rapidan Camp historic site

**Entry:** 45 MP - Hawksbill Gap

**Exit:** 65 MP - Swift Run (north)

**Map(s):** PATC #10 Central District

### Day One

Campsite: Central District developed areas - campground or cabin

5.1 miles

Park at Hawksbill Gap.

Hike up Lower Hawksbill Mountain Trail, 0.9 mile.

Enjoy the view from the highest peak in the park.

Take Salamander Trail down to the Appalachian Trail (AT), 0.8 mile.

Turn left onto the AT, hiking 3.4 miles.

Turn left to Big Meadows Campground (several spur trails lead there.)

Register with the campground office for a walk-in site.

### Day Two

Campsite: Laurel Prong Trail - backcountry

6.1 to 7.1 miles

Hike south on the AT a short distance from the Big Meadows Amphitheatre.

Turn right onto Lewis Falls Trail and hike 1.8 miles.

Bear right onto the gravel road and right again onto the AT for about 2 miles.

Cross Skyline Drive and bear left onto Mill Prong Trail, 1.8 miles.

Explore Rapidan Camp, then find your way south west to Laurel Prong Trail.

Look for a place to camp Laurel Prong Trail between Cat Knob Trail and Fork Mountain Trail junctions.

Remember that the area within 0.5 mile of Rapidan Camp is closed to camping.

### Day Three

Campsite: Central District developed areas - campground or cabin

5.7 to 6.7 miles

Continue on Laurel Prong Trail to the AT (total distance on Laurel Prong, 2.8 miles).

Turn left onto the AT, hiking south 3.6 miles to Lewis Mountain Campground.

Bearfence Rock Scramble is worth the extra effort if everyone has good balance (add 0.3 mile).

Register at the campground office.

### Day Four

5.3 miles

Return to the AT, continuing to hike south as far as desired.

The suggested stopping point is South River Picnic Area in 5.3 miles.

(However, there are other places to get off the trail before and after)

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### Notes

Both campgrounds are popular and often fill to capacity on weekends and holidays. Lewis Mountain Campground at all times, and Big Meadows Campground during the spring (April to mid-May) are first-come, first-served. If it is a sunny or holiday weekend, plan to arrive at either campground by 4:00 p.m. to get a campsite. Reservations are strongly recommended at Big Meadows during the main camping season. All Shenandoah NP campgrounds are closed in the winter (generally from mid-November through March). See the camping section at [www.nps.gov/shen](http://www.nps.gov/shen) for more information, or call 540-999-3500.

This is an great Friday-through-Monday trip, as you can make reservations at Big Meadows for Friday night, and Lewis should have space available on Sunday unless it is a holiday.